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GEMS: From Mobilisation to Resolution

NAPTOSA extends its sincere gratitude to every member who came out in support of the mass protest action held on Saturday, 21 February 2026.

Your presence was a powerful demonstration of unity, discipline and collective strength. Thousands of public servants stood together under the leadership of the Federation of Unions of South Africa (FEDUSA), alongside its affiliates HOSPERSA, NAPTOSA, NATU, PEU, PSA and SAOU.

You did not march out of anger alone – you marched out of necessity.

Public servants are under immense financial pressure. The rising costs of food, electricity, fuel and transport continue to erode household income, while wage adjustments remain modest. Against this backdrop, the Government Employees Medical Scheme (GEMS) implemented a 9.8% increase in January 2026, adjusted to a 9.5% contribution increase effective 1 February 2026. This follows a 13.4% increase in 2025 – a cumulative escalation of over 23% in just two years.

This trajectory is unsustainable. It is socially regressive. And it cannot continue without challenge.

Our Demands Were Clear and Structured

In the Memorandum of Demands submitted to GEMS management and the Board, organised labour called for:

- 🔗 The immediate withdrawal of the 9.5% increase implemented on 1 February 2026
- 🔗 A revised and affordable contribution structure developed in consultation with organised labour
- 🔗 Full financial transparency, including operational budgets, administrative costs, outsourcing contracts, procurement arrangements and executive and Board remuneration
- 🔗 An independent forensic audit into governance and procurement practices
- 🔗 A comprehensive review of outsourcing and administrative cost drivers
- 🔗 A review of the funding and reserve model, including the statutory 25% reserve requirement
- 🔗 Governance reform and strengthened labour representation in decision-making structures
- 🔗 The reversal of unilateral changes to the Tanzanite One benefit option
- 🔗 Accountability at executive level

These are not unreasonable demands. They are responsible and necessary interventions to protect members' interests.

What Happens Next

We want to assure you: **we will not be sitting back.**

The struggle now moves into its next phase.

1. Engagement with the Minister

The Minister of the Department of Public Service and Administration has invited organised labour to a follow-up meeting and has undertaken to provide comprehensive feedback on his engagement with the GEMS Board. We expect firm commitments and clear outcomes – particularly on affordability and governance accountability.

2. PSCBC Engagements

At the Public Service Coordinating Bargaining Council, the review of PSCBC Resolution 1 of 2006 has been formally tabled, with engagements commencing in March. This review is critical to ensure that GEMS remains a social solidarity instrument for public servants and does not drift from its founding mandate. Further engagements with GEMS will also take place at the PSCBC to address contribution increases, funding models and labour participation.

3. Section 77 Application at NEDLAC

FEDUSA has submitted a Section 77 application to the National Economic Development and Labour Council in preparation for potential nationwide mass protest action. This signals that organised labour is prepared to escalate lawfully if meaningful resolution is not achieved.

4. Legal Review

FEDUSA is seeking a legal opinion on the legality of the recent increases and whether they may be reversed through judicial intervention. Should inconsistencies or procedural flaws with the scheme's founding mandate be identified, we will not hesitate to pursue court remedies.

Our Commitment to You

Saturday's mobilisation demonstrated that public servants are united and resolute. The coming weeks will determine whether those responsible for governance at GEMS are prepared to act decisively to restore affordability and rebuild trust.

NAPTOSA remains committed to structured engagement – but we are equally clear: **the campaign for affordable healthcare will intensify if our legitimate demands are ignored.**

We will continue to keep members fully informed as developments unfold.

Public servants built this scheme. Public servants sustain it. It must serve your interests, protect your families and honour its founding purpose.

Thank you for standing firm.
Thank you for your discipline.
Thank you for your unity.

In solidarity,

Mr BL Manuel

Executive Director